



Decision Memo

CenturyLink Highway 84 Fiber Installation Project

USDA Forest Service

Pagosa Ranger District, San Juan National Forest

Archuleta County, Colorado

Background

CenturyLink submitted two proposals to the Forest Service to install new buried fiber optic communication lines and associated appurtenances on National Forest System (NFS) land at the beginning the Coyote Park Road, along the south side of Hwy 84 to Trophy Lake Place, and two additional fiber installation projects along Highway 84 near the Lower Blanco Road. This project will utilize existing CenturyLink sites and will be updating the equipment and adding fiber cable. The portions on NFS lands are part of larger projects that include installing fiber on private property. The cable will be buried in a trench using a vibratory plow mounted on a tracked piece of equipment such as a tractor, bulldozer, or equivalent. Backfilling of the trench will occur at the time the cable is buried. A plow typically results in soil disturbance 2-feet wide, with a tractor or bulldozer path roughly 5 to 8 feet wide. There will be no tree disturbance and minimal grubbing of shrubs/brush to install the line.

Highway 84/Coyote Park Project Area

Fiber will be placed on approximately 5,088 feet (0.96 miles) of NFS land along the south side of Hwy 84 and at the beginning of Coyote Park Road (CR 359). The authorization would cover 5 feet on either side of the centerline of the line. The elevation of the Coyote Park project area is approximately 7,360 to 7,500 feet. The portion of the project on NFS land is located in T33N, R1W, Sections 13 and 24, and T33N, R1E, Section 19.

Highway 84/Lower Blanco Project Area

Fiber will be placed on approximately 2,186 feet (0.41 miles) of NFS land along the west side of Hwy 84 and along the south side of the beginning of Lower Blanco Road (CR 335). The authorization would cover 5 feet on either side of the centerline of the line. The elevation of the Lower Blanco project area is approximately 7,000 to 7,120 feet. The portion of the project on NFS land is located in T34N, R1W, Section 22.

Decision

I have decided to approve the CenturyLink Highway 84 Fiber Installation project. The project areas are shown on the map in Attachment A. Access for the project will be along the Highway 84, CR 335, and CR 359. No roads will be constructed and snow removal is not authorized. My decision also incorporates all design criteria listed in Attachment B, which will be made a part of the special use permit.

Category of the Proposed Action

This action is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement (EIS) or an environmental assessment (EA). The applicable category of action is identified in agency procedures as "Additional construction or reconstruction of existing telephone or utility lines in a designated corridor." 36 CFR 220.6(e)(2).

Finding of No Extraordinary Circumstances

The proposed project was analyzed by an interdisciplinary team of Forest Service specialists including a wildlife biologist, hydrologist, and archeologist. Based on site specific field analysis, the Interdisciplinary Team has determined the following regarding extraordinary circumstances.

- (1) *Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species*

Plants – There is suitable habitat and designated critical habitat in the project area for one federally listed plant species (Pagosa skyrocket), but this species has never been found in the project area. An analysis of impacts to Pagosa skyrocket found that there would be no effect to this federally listed species. It was also determined that the proposed action would not result in the destruction or adverse modification of its designated critical habitat. There is also habitat for five sensitive plant species in the project area, including violet milkvetch, Missouri milkvetch, Aztec milkvetch, cushion bladderpod, and frosty bladderpod. Impacts to suitable habitat will be localized to the ROW and of short duration. Therefore, it has been determined that the proposed action may adversely impact individuals, but is not likely to result in a loss of species viability in the Planning Area, nor cause a trend toward federal listing for these five sensitive plant species. No other sensitive plant species will be impacted by the project.

Fish and Wildlife – There is no potential habitat or designated critical habitat within the project areas for any federally listed fish or wildlife species, so the project will have no effect on federally listed species or their habitat. For sensitive fish or wildlife species, habitat is present for Lewis woodpecker, Loggerhead shrike, Northern leopard frog, Monarch butterfly, and western bumblebee. Impacts to these species are expected to be negligible given the small scope, scale, and duration of disturbance associated with the project. Therefore, it has been determined that the proposed action may adversely impact individuals, but is not likely to result in a loss of species viability in the Planning Area, nor cause a trend toward federal listing for these five sensitive wildlife species. No other sensitive fish or wildlife species will be impacted by the project.

- (2) *Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds*: There are no wetlands or municipal supply watersheds in the project area. There are floodplains or flood-prone areas in the project area, but no adverse effects are anticipated.
- (3) *Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas*: The project activities would not occur in any congressionally designated areas.
- (4) *Inventoried roadless areas*: No project activities would occur within a Colorado Roadless Area.
- (5) *Research natural areas*: No project activities would occur within a Research Natural Area.
- (6) *American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites, Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas*: In compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (as amended) and 36 CFR 800, a Class III cultural resource inventory has been conducted within the areas of potential effect (APE) and an analysis of effects to cultural resources during project implementation was performed by a cultural resource specialist. The project APE on NFS land is located adjacent to or through three NRHP eligible prehistoric sites (5AA.1731, 5AA.2415 and 5AA.3184). Portions of these sites within the Highway 84 right-of-way and/or existing powerline/

telephone line corridors have been previously disturbed. Any subsurface work associated with this permitted undertaking may only occur within previously disturbed areas of the sites. Areas where equipment and trenching activities must not occur will be flagged for avoidance and an archaeological site monitor may be present during project implementation in the vicinity of the sites. Per SHPO concurrence in a letter dated July 17, 2020, with implementation of the avoidance measures described above, there will be no adverse effect to historic properties from the project.

It was determined that there are no extraordinary circumstances potentially having effects which may significantly affect the environment. Potential impacts will be mitigated by adoption of the design criteria. Therefore, no further analysis or documentation in an EA or EIS is warranted.

Public Involvement

Forest Service resource specialists were consulted on the project. The project was also listed in the San Juan National Forest's Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) starting in July 2020. No significant issues were identified by internal scoping or publication in the SOPA.

Findings Required by Other Laws

This decision is consistent with the 2013 San Juan National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan as required by the National Forest Management Act and the project is in compliance with applicable forest plan standards and guidelines. The project is also in compliance with other Federal, State, and local laws. The project was reviewed for compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, the Endangered Species Act, and the Clean Water Act. The proposed action, with design criteria, is in compliance with these laws. In addition, it has been concluded that the proposed action will not contribute to, or involve any extraordinary circumstances that would affect the viability of any migratory bird species on the San Juan National Forest. The Coyote Park project area is in management area Theme 5, Active Management. The Lower Blanco project area is in Theme 3, Natural Landscapes with Limited Management.

Implementation Date

This project may be implemented immediately upon signature of this document. Implementation is planned to begin in the summer or fall of 2020.

Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

This decision is not subject to administrative review or appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.12 (f).

Contact

For additional information, contact Becca Smith, Pagosa Ranger District, San Juan National Forest, 180 Pagosa St., P.O. Box 310, Pagosa Springs, CO 81147, (970) 264-2268, rebecca.smith@usda.gov.

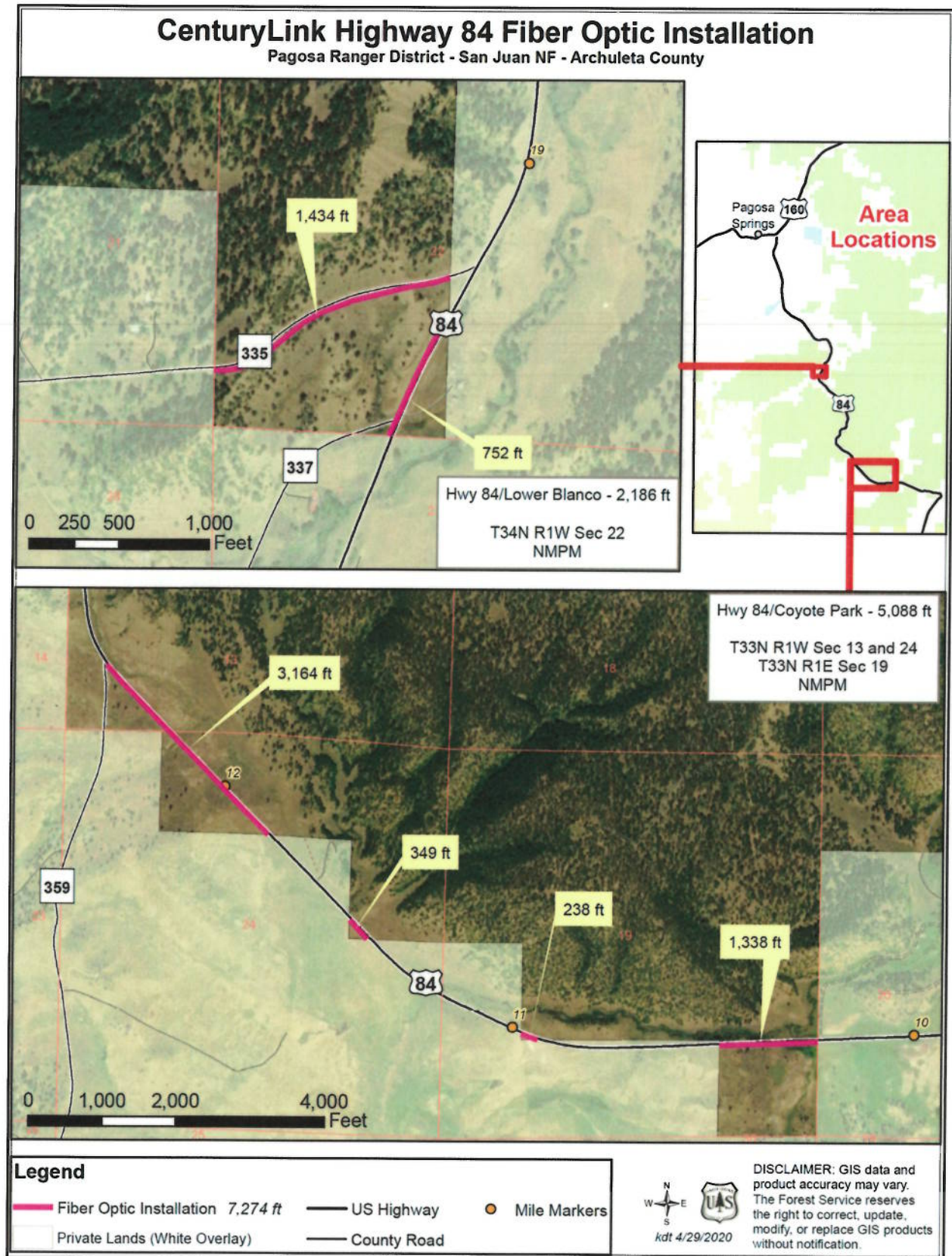


Kevin C. Khung
District Ranger



Date

Attachment A: Coyote Park and Lower Blanco Project Areas Map



Attachment B: Design Criteria

Vegetation

- All vehicles and equipment will be restricted to the ROWs during construction.

Public Safety

- Adequate traffic control to protect public safety will be implemented. CenturyLink will acquire any necessary permits from the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) and all terms and conditions in CDOT's permits will be followed. CenturyLink will consult with Archuleta County regarding traffic control requirements on County Roads.

Cultural Resources

- The project area of potential effect (APE) on NFS land is located adjacent to or through three NRHP eligible prehistoric sites (5AA.1731, 5AA.2415 and 5AA.3184). Portions of these sites within the Highway 84 right-of-way and/or existing powerline/telephone line corridors have been previously disturbed. Any subsurface work associated with this permitted undertaking may only occur within previously disturbed areas of the sites. Areas where equipment and trenching activities must not occur will be flagged for avoidance and an archaeological site monitor may be present during project implementation in the vicinity of the sites.

Water and Riparian Design Criteria

- Ensure equipment is weed free prior to operation on NFS lands.
- When soils are saturated, equipment operation would cease until the ground dries out or freezes. Soils are considered saturated when ruts 4 inches deep or deeper are created by equipment or vehicles on native surface roads or off road.

Measures for reclamation

- Disperse runoff to prevent surface erosion. An appropriate seed mix approved by the Forest Service will be applied to the area if needed to prevent surface erosion.

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